



Language Counts!

How we talk with and about people matters. That includes those among us who are living with a brain injury and/or are using or at risk of using substances in a harmful way. Engaging in a positive, respectful way paves the way to relationships that can lead to health and healing.

Take a minute to revise the deficit-based language on the left to strength-based language:

Deficit-based, “unperson” centered language	Strengths-based, person centered language
Patient	
Brain Damaged/Brain Injured	
Front line staff/in the trenches	
Drug Addict	
Suffering from/with a Brain Injury	
In Denial	
Weaknesses	
Unmotivated	
Substance user/alcoholic	
Entitled	
Manipulative	
Resistant	
Suffering from	
Caring for	

Language Matters! Possible Answers

Deficit-based, “unperson” centered language	Strengths-based, person centered language
Patient	Person
Brain Damaged/Brain Injured	Person living with a brain injury
Front line staff/in the trenches	Direct care staff/Supporter/Coach
Drug Addict	Person who uses drugs
Suffering from/with a Brain Injury	Has a history of brain injury, living with/managing/adapting to living with a brain injury/working to overcome brain injury related barriers
In Denial	Brain Injury related lack of awareness
Weaknesses	Barriers to personal goals
Unmotivated	Initiation impacted by brain injury
Substance user/alcoholic	Not currently ready to change substance use, does not see the consequences of reducing/eliminating use (these are examples of pre-contemplative/contemplative stages in the Stages of Change Model)
Entitled	Effective self-advocate
Manipulative	Resourceful
Resistant	Makes own decisions
Suffering from	Living with
Caring for	Supporting, engaging with or working with

Adapted by A. Edmonston & J Nesbitt (2020) from the following sources: Tondora & Davidson 2006, White 2001, Meter Services 2006, Tondora 2020



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